once. Yes, please drive on, right through. His house was out a ways,—a white house with a crimson rambler over the front door. It set quite a distance back from the street."

And, looking for that crimson rambler, we mighty near missed the house after all; for no climbin' rose is in evidence. Mrs. Duntley-Kipp, though, spots a couple of attic dormers that looked familiar.

"That's where it ought to be," says she. "But there were no bay windows nor front veranda."

"Maybe they've built 'em on since," I suggests. "Lemme hop out and see. What was the name?"

"Little," says she. "Ask if this isn't the old Little place."

SO I pushes through the gate and goes scoutin' up the walk to the house. Scattered promiscuous on the veranda are a couple of baseball bats, a jointed wooden fishin' rod, a doll carriage with a busted front wheel, and a row of fancy mud pies set out to cook in the sun. But not a soul in sight. I raps on the new screen door. Nothin' happens. I could hear some one movin' about in the back, though; so I strolls around until I comes to the kitchen.

"Hello!" I sings out. "Anybody home?"

And then there appears this meek, scrubby-lookin' party with the funny bald spot in front and the prominent neck apple. He's in his shirt sleeves and suspenders, and around his waist is tied a blue and white checked apron. Also he's smokin' a corncob pipe and wipin' dishes. He glances at me a bit suspicious and timid.

"Just tryin' to locate the old Little place," says I.

"Why," says he, "this is it."

"Well, well!" says I. "Some one's been revisin' it, eh?"

"Yes," says he, wavin' me in cordial. "I've been doing a little every summer since I got hold of it: not much, but here and there. I did want to build on a sleeping porch this summer; but business has been so slow. You see, we only stay here a couple of months."

"Oh!" says I. "Come up from the city, do you?"

"Brooklyn," says he. "I'm in the retail coal business, and summers there ain't much doin'. This is such a good place for the youngsters. They're out now with their Maw, blackberryin'; all but Amaryllis here."

I steps further in and takes a peek at Amaryllis, perched up in her high chair and dabblin' with a spoon in a dish of oatmeal.

"How many, all told?" says I.

"Kids?" says he. "Oh, there's five. They need a lot of room to traipse round in, and this place is just right for 'em."

"Don't expect you know anything of the Littles that used to live here?" says I.

"Ought to," says he. "I'm one."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"I was born here," says he, "and when the old folks died off of course the place came to me, mortgage and all."

"But, say," says I, starin' at him, "you don't mean you're the Little who—well, the one that—"

"Why, Dick!" comes a voice from the doorway behind me.

I hadn't heard her, hadn't thought of her followin'; but there she was,—Mrs. Duntley-Kipp, dimples, sparklin' eyes, and all, and holdin' out one of her neat gloved hands. As for Little, he just stood starin' stupid, stupid and woodeny.

"Dick Little!" she goes on. "Don't you dare pretend you don't remember me!"

Which produces some picture, take it from me. For Mr. Little ain't just what you'd call a romantic type.

And there's Mrs. Duntley-Kipp, as smart and trim as a spray of honeysuckle with the dew on. To think that them two was ever—well, I just gives up and stands one side listenin' open faced. Little removes the cob pipe and hides the dish towel and blue platter behind him.

"Why!" says he. "If—if it ain't Gertie!"

HE actually pinks up and begins fumblin' his hands, as if tryin' to decide what he ought to do next—drop the platter on the floor, or chuck it at the sink.

"That's better, much better," says she. "I know I've changed; but I don't like to admit it. Doing the dishes, aren't you? How splendid! But you know I always did insist that you were a nice boy."

Mr. Little indulges in a fussed, foolish snicker and then gives her a quick glance to see if she ain't makin' fun of him.

"Come," says the lady, "aren't you going to shake hands, just for old times' sake?"

He drops the dish and towel and pipe on the kitchen table, wipes his hands on the apron, and they swaps grips.

"Maybe we'd better go out front?" he suggests.

"No, let's stay here, where you can look after the baby," says Mrs. Duntley-Kipp. "Isn't she a chubby little dear? She has your eyes, Dick, hasn't she?"

Mr. Little grins again. "Guess she has."

"Do you know," she goes on, "the moment I saw Seavers Falls on the signboard I thought of those brown eyes of yours, and how solemnly you used to watch me out of them that summer until—until we got better acquainted. Let's see, we met first up at the mill, didn't we?"

"I'd seen you twice before that," says he. "Once at Mrs. Drew's boarding-house the day after you came, and again at the post-office."

"Really!" says she. "You never told me. But wasn't that a glorious summer?"

A far-away, dreamy look was flickerin' in Mr. Little's eyes. Come to look at 'em close, they wa'n't such bad eyes, either. They was still brown.

"It was great!" says he.

"The fishing!" she goes on. "And paddling up the river those hot afternoons in that absurd old boat! Remember that hollow stump where I used to hide my shoes and stockings?"

"It's gone," says he. "Rotted away. I couldn't find it at all last summer."

"Ah-ha!" says she. "Then you looked?"

He hangs his head guilty and blushes.

"I saw the sweetfern pasture up on Cleft Mountain as we drove in," she suggests, glancin' at him with a knowin' nod.

He looks up quick and nods back. "I remember," says he.

"Weren't we deliciously silly then?" says she. "What was it you declared my hair smelled of?"

"Clover tops," says he. "It did too."

"What utter nonsense!" says she, givin' him a playful tap on the arm. "Anyway, it was dear of you to think so. And those moonlight evenings when we went strolling off, hand in hand, listening to the whippoorwills and locusts—warm, soft nights—and such foolish things you used to whisper. No, they were pretty sentiments; almost poetic, at times. Do you know, I rather expected you to be a poet."

"Y-e-e-es," says he, twistin' up one corner of the apron, "I did try; but then I—I drifted into the coal business."

Somehow that seems to break the spell. Mrs. Duntley-Kipp's mouth corners twitch jumpy once or twice before she gives up tryin' to keep back the laugh. Then it comes out, clear and ripply.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she protests. "How could you? My last illusion! Well, it couldn't be helped, I suppose. Twenty years ago nearly, wasn't it! But in that time I've lost so many; while you—"

She ends by glancin' at little Amaryllis, whose chubby countenance is smeared up reckless with cold oatmeal.

Mr. Little he continues to gaze mushy and admirin' at the lady, not gettin' wise to any change. All of a sudden she gets up.

"Good-by, Dick," says she.

"Good-by—er—Gertie," says he.

THEY'D just finished shakin' hands and was exchangin' a last look when in floats a raspy, high-pitched voice:

"Ho, Paw! Paw!"

Mr. Little tints up at the sound and glances around panicky. Then he stands there stupid, without makin' a move. We all turns and stares out the back door.

Not for long, though. Half a minute more and there's a scuff of rubber-soled shoes and in waddles a heavy-faced, tousle-haired female, built wide and gen'rous. I expect her costume was just the thing for blackberryin'. Anyway, not much more could happen to that saggy khaki skirt, or the shirtwaist with the sleeve slit to the shoulder. Some shoulder it was too! And the lady didn't need to worry about her complexion. It was beyond marrin'.

She don't seem at all fussed at seein' strangers in her kitchen. Course she gawps a bit, as is only natural, and then turns inquirin' to Little.

"Why, Paw!" says she. "Who's this?"

Paw he ain't a quick thinker or a ready explainer. "Why," says he, workin' his fingers nervous, "this is—er—it's—"

He was stammerin' and gulpin' and shufflin' his feet pathetic when Mrs. Duntley-Kipp comes graceful to the rescue.

"I stopped to ask about some one I used to know here a long time ago," says she. "You see, I spent a summer here as a girl, and—well, there was a boy, of course. You understand. A perfectly dear boy he was too, and we had such a silly, delightful summer together that I—I wanted to know what had become of him."

"Oh!" says Mrs. Little, noddin' her head. "Yes, yes. Well, Paw he used to live here—I wonder if he knows who it could have been? Do you, Paw?"

WHICH was battin' it straight at Mr. Little. He wouldn't make a good shortstop, though, Paw Little. He'd fumble anything that come his way, like he does this one. What do you guess is his answer to that?

"Know who it was?" says he. "Maybe. What—what if it was me?"

"You!" gasps Mrs. Little. She takes one quick, startled look at him, and then stares for a second at our flossy grass widow, takin' her all in. Then she turns back to Paw, sniffin' contemptuous. "You!" she goes on. "Oh, talk sense, Paw!"

Then it's Paw's turn to gasp. Also he colors up some in the neck. "But see here, Maw!" he insists. "You asked if—"

"There, there!" breaks in Mrs. Little. "Run out to the back gate and see that them clumsy boys don't spill that pail of berries 'fore they git 'em in here. Trot, now!"

And Paw he trots. So do we.

We finds Pinckney pacin' up and down the road restless, smokin' a cigarette, and Sadie out pickin' a bunch of daisies.

"My word!" says Pinckney. "We were beginning to think you'd both gone for good."

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting so long," says Mrs. Duntley-Kipp.

"Couldn't be helped," says I. "We've been 'way back into once-upon-a-time."

"And is the excursion ended?" he asks.

"Quite," says Mrs. Duntley-Kipp, climbin' into the limousine.

# The Mystery of Ambrose Bierce

By BAILEY MILLARD

AMBROSE BIERCE has been figuring in as great a mystery as any of those contained in his weird books of tales, "In the Midst of Life" and "Can Such Things Be?" Bierce, who is seventy-three years old if he is still alive, as has been reported recently, was a Federal Major in the Civil War and served with great gallantry. Equipped with what Gertrude Atherton characterizes as "the best brutal imagination of any writer in America," he wove out of his war experiences the most ghastly and gruesome yarns ever published in this country.

## His Disappearance

"BITTER BIERCE," as they called him in London in the early seventies, when he sojourned and wrote there, was born in Ohio. After the war he went to California, where he lived for more than thirty years. He then went to Washington, where he resided until the summer of 1913, when, in his seventy-second year,

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and suffering from frequent and severe attacks of asthma, he went to Mexico, ostensibly to join the staff of General Villa.

In Mexico he disappeared, and it was reported to the State Department at Washington that he had been foully dealt with. Rumors of various kinds as to his death, or as to his whereabouts as a living man, were published in the newspapers; but the State Department could find no definite trace of him after his leaving Chihuahua city in December, 1913. He was reported to have been murdered just before the battle of Torreon, while serving on General Villa's staff; but Villa declared that Bierce was never with him—that, in fact, he never had met him.

After nine months of weary waiting for news of him, his family gave him up as dead, and long obituaries of him were published in newspapers and magazines.

But behold! On April 2, after having utterly disappeared for over a year, a cable came from London stating that the missing author had turned up in that city in good health, and that he had joined Lord Kitchener's staff. The papers that had printed his obituaries published this news with the stories of his life and his strange disappearance. But now the obituary writers are again sharpening their pencils, for the State Department's investigation of the new report is said to have resulted in finding it groundless.

## He Was a Fatalist

ONE fact that would tend to show that the world has seen its last of this remarkable man is that Bierce had told a few of his friends that he did not intend to survive his seventy-second year, as life had become a burden to him because of his malady. He was seventy-two on June 24, 1914. Others, however, point out the indisputable fact that Bierce had been a lifelong fatalist, and that the bare idea of suicide was alien to his temperament. So this remarkable mystery is still a mystery.